

Telegram from the British Foreign Office on Sudanese independence (London, 16 September 1955)

Caption: On 16 September 1955, the British Foreign Office sends a telegram to the British Embassy in Cairo in which it sets out its position on the process of independence in Sudan and advises Egypt not to oppose Sudanese independence.

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SECRET

FROM FOREIGN OFFICE TO CAIRO

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No: 1988

September 16, 1955.

D: 12 Noon September 16, 1955.

IMMEDIATE

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Addressed to Cairo telegram No: 1988 of September 16

Repeated for information to:

Gov. Gen. Khartoum. U.K.T.C. Khartoum [Immediate].

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B.M.E.O. No: 785.

Your telegram No: 1265 [of September 15]: Sudan.

I quite understand your position. It is of course unwise, if we are to do business on many issues in the future with Nasser to put him in an embarrassing position. We have no desire to do this. Nevertheless, in life the cards must be played as they fall. We have had to carry a good deal of obloquy in the past and we do not see why we should carry it in the future. I suggest that you should say to Nasser that, since both of us have publicly let it be known that we accept the idea of a plebiscite on the independence question, there is no going back on this, either for him or for us. The question then arises whether it is really in the interest of the Sudan to go through this long and laborious process if it can be quickened up. It will not help any of us to prolong the uncertainty. Moreover, as practical people, we must accept the fact that recent troubles in the South increase the difficulties of an effective plebiscite. You could therefore suggest to him that the co-domini should now jointly gain credit for themselves instead of being further involved in dispute and discussion. The way to do this is for us both to say that we accept the principle of an independent Sudan. This will give him credit and no discredit to us. Let us do it together and share the advantages that may accrue to us both. The practical way to do this would surely be to allow the present Parliament to set about the job of constitution making. When it has done this satisfactorily a day will be appointed and the new state will come formally into being.

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Foreign Office telegram No: 1988 to Cairo

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2. The question arises, what part if any the international Supervisory Commission should play. If there is to be no plebiscite and no election for a constituent assembly, the main element in the original purpose disappears. On the other hand, the Sudanese Government may feel that they will gain in public reputation by finding some use for this instrument. If it has nothing to do with the elections and is only to "supervise the making of the constitution" it is a much more limited field and the gentlemen appointed would no doubt be chosen with this in view.

3. If, however, Nasser does not seem attracted by this approach, you should remind him that we at any rate, cannot go back on our publicly declared support of the plebiscite. You might even hint to him that it would be very embarrassing for him if our new proposals become known. However we should much prefer to act in loyal partnership with him in the future in the matter of the Sudan. It would be best for us all in the long run.

4. If you think that Nasser is hesitating about early independence primarily because he fears he will not get a satisfactory agreement on Nile Waters you should add that we fully understand his pre-occupation with this problem. If you think it useful, you may tell him we should be ready to take part in further talks if this would help. (Separate telegram on this subject follows). But you should warn him that in our experience, which is quite considerable, of giving free constitutions to countries long under tutelary control, you are much more likely to get what you want if you treat them generously and show confidence in them. In any case, we think it would be a mistake from Egypt's point of view to link settlement of the Waters with the future constitutional position of the Sudan. That will only lead to perpetual friction.

JJJJJ